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GOVERNING COUNCIL
Sixteenth session
Nairobi, 20-31 May 1991
Item 4 of the Provisional Agenda

Introductory Report of the Executive Director

Addendum

WORLD ENVIRONMENT ACADEMY

Summary

The present report provides information on the activities carried out by UNEP in investigating the possibility of establishing a World Environment Academy and contains a description of the possible objectives, nature, structure, and cost of such an Academy, together with other factors to be taken into consideration, particularly with regard to the location of such an Academy.

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to:

1. Take note of the report of the Executive Director on the World Environment Academy;

2. Authorize the Executive Director to establish the Academy, along the lines described in his report, for an experimental period of two years and approve $1.2 million for that purpose;

3. Request the Executive Director to submit to the Council at its next (seventeenth) regular session an evaluation of the experimental phase of the Academy for the Council's consideration and further decision.

WORLD ENVIRONMENT ACADEMY

INTRODUCTION

1. The idea of creating a World Environment Academy evolved out of discussions at the Informal Ministerial Consultations convened by the Executive Director in January 1989, and was further discussed during the second Consultations in January 1990, where it met with interest and approval.

2. Subsequently, the idea of a World Environment Academy was one of the new initiatives proposed by the Executive Director in his report to the Governing Council at its second special session in August 1990 1/. In considering this, and other proposals contained in the report of the Executive Director on priority evolving environmental issues 1/, the Council requested the Executive Director to prepare for submission to the Council at its sixteenth session, in consultation with Governments, including the Committee of Permanent Representatives, a consolidated report on the future role of the United Nations Environment Programme.

3. In examining the issue of an Academy, UNEP held consultations with, and conducted a survey of the activities of, several relevant international organizations, including the Third World Academy of Sciences, the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), the International Federation of Institutes for Advanced Study, the International Centre for Earth and Environmental Sciences, the World Maritime University, AGROPOLIS (Complexe international de recherche et d'enseignement superieur agronomique), the proposed UNDP Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe, the European Science Foundation, the World Academy of Art and Science, and the proposed Academy of the Environment in Switzerland. The results of these surveys are available on request.

4. The Executive Director convened a meeting of an Ad Hoc Group of Experts on the World Environment Academy in Nairobi on 3 and 4 December 1990 and later, in February 1991, held informal inter-agency consultations with representatives of ILO, WHO, Unesco, UNIDO, UNU and UNCED. The surveys, the consultations and the deliberations of the Expert Group led to the same conclusion, namely that, in view of the international needs (outlined in section II below) and in the absence of any international body which could adequately respond to such needs, it would be desirable and justifiable to create a new international body that would be serve as a forum for policy-oriented, interdisciplinary and intersectoral interaction in the field of environment and development. Such a body could provide scientific information and advice on environmental management and promote environmental research and training for the developing countries in particular.

I. OBJECTIVES OF THE ACADEMY

5. The objectives of a World Environment Academy can be grouped under two clusters: the first, dealing with scientific information and advice on global environmental management; and the second, seeking to promote environmental research and training, in particular for the developing countries.

1/ UNEP/GCSS.II/2 and Corr.1 and 2 and Add.1-4.

Provision of scientific information and advice on global environmental management

6. Policy decisions for environmental management are often hampered or delayed by lack of adequate scientific knowledge. Thus, one of the tasks of the Academy would be to prepare scientific briefs and reports on specified environmental issues for the benefit of decision makers.

7. Environmental problems, particularly those related to sustainable development, require a multidisciplinary approach. It is essential that there be an intellectual interaction between various groups, including scientists, environmental engineers and those dealing with development sectors, such as industry, agriculture, energy, transport, economics, trade, urban planning and technology development. Likewise, the solution to such environmental problems calls for interaction with the social sectors, i.e. education, health, demography, etc. A World Environment Academy would ensure interdisciplinary consultations, define the needs for international studies, and foster such intellectual interaction.

Promotion of research and training, in particular for developing countries

8. Most environmental problems require in-depth research before workable solutions, relevant to the countries concerned, can be found. Even environmental assessment requires field-specific research. The Academy, in close co-operation with existing international organizations such as the United Nations University (UNU), Unesco, IIASA, the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU), and the International Federation of Institutes for Advanced Study, could plan and co-ordinate the implementation of specific international environmental research programmes in networks of environmental research institutions, with special emphasis on promoting co-operation between institutions in developed countries and those in developing countries.

9. The Academy would also provide grants for relevant research activities, giving special consideration to promising young researchers and women scientists. In selecting the specific areas for a research programme, the Academy would avoid duplication and would seek enhanced co-ordination and co-operation with existing efforts within the United Nations system and the major international non-governmental bodies. Issues that the Academy might consider supporting would include: improving guidelines for environmental impact assessment; developing methodologies to integrate environmental considerations into development planning and projects; conducting environmental risk analyses; examining environmental standard setting; studying the development of renewable sources of energy; developing cheap technologies for pollution control; and promoting and defining environmental and natural-resource accounting.

10. In many developing countries the lack of qualified cadres and other experts hampers the development and implementation of action for sustainable development. The Academy, in close collaboration with relevant international organizations, in particular, UNEP, Unesco, UNU and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), would promote and make optimal use of environmental training opportunities by: (i) establishing a database on international environmental training opportunities; (ii) functioning as a clearing-house for maximum use of such opportunities; (iii) identifying gaps and making recommendations on the future development of international training courses and institutions; and (iv) providing training scholarships for trainees from developing countries, in particular promising young trainees and women.

11. It has to be emphasized that existing United Nations organizations and agencies are already carrying out a good deal of activity in the above-mentioned areas. However, the Academy (by virtue of its structure and the participation of all relevant United Nations agencies and organs in its Board of Trustees) would act specifically as a forum for reviewing ongoing plans and activities and could thus identify gaps and devise ways to fill them, either through its own structure or through other relevant international institutions.

II. NATURE OF THE ACADEMY

12. Although the Academy would be established as a joint venture between UNEP, Unesco, and UNU, it would become an independent, self-financing body as soon as possible, but certainly no later than five years after its establishment. Its output and messages should be directed to specific audiences which would include: Governments, the United Nations system, academia, the private sector, including industry and trade unions, and NGOs and foundations.

III. STRUCTURE OF THE ACADEMY

13. The proposed structure of the Academy is outlined in the following paragraphs, but as that structure progressively develops, the Academy will need to be highly flexible and adaptable to emerging international needs. It will establish its own rules and regulations.

14. The World Environment Academy would be constituted by its Assembly, comprising 50 Fellows, up to 100 Associate Fellows (corresponding members) and a small secretariat. There would normally be an annual session of the Assembly, where the over-all programme of the Academy would be adopted. The Academy would be equipped with basic research facilities, particularly a good library and computers. Its facilities should enable it to organize international and interdisciplinary research and training programmes in fields such as economics and the planning of environmentally sound development, and environmental and natural-resource accounting. For the implementation of such programmes, the Academy would also develop international networks of research and training institutions dealing with environmental studies and management. The Academy would establish the procedures and arrangements for research and study by resident Fellows.

15. It would be extremely useful if there were regional branches or centres of the Academy with their own networks of collaborating institutions. These regional branches or centres would work very closely with the regional structures of UNU and Unesco.

Board of Trustees

16. Until the Academy is fully established, a Board of Trustees of about 15 members would be set up to make preparatory arrangements and carry out backstopping and support functions, especially fund raising, for the Academy. The Board should exist for no more than three to five years. Its membership would include the heads (or their senior representatives) of UNEP, UNU, Unesco and ICSU, three to four representatives of Governments, including the host Government, and one or two representatives of each of the following groups: academia, industry, trade unions, NGOs and foundations. Board meetings would be convened by the Executive Director of UNEP.

Bureau of the Academy

17. The Bureau would be composed of a President, two Vice-Presidents and a Secretary-General, all of whom would be elected by the Assembly of the Academy from among its Fellows. The Bureau would follow up on the implementation of the Academy's programmes.

Nomination of Fellows and Associate Fellows

18. The first ten Fellows of the Academy would be selected by the Board of Trustees. The rest would be selected progressively by the Fellows themselves at the annual Assembly sessions. The same applies to Associate Fellows. The selection would be governed by criteria to be established by the Assembly.

The Secretariat

19. The Executive Secretary should be a recruited staff member who would be responsible for providing administrative support for the activities of the Bureau and the Assembly, and implementing the programmes of the Academy, under the supervision of the Bureau. The Executive Secretary should be of high academic standing and have management capability. In addition to the Executive Secretary, the Secretariat would have three Professional staff members (one D-1/P-5 and two P-4/P-3) and three General Service staff.

Affiliation and patronage

20. The Academy would seek Memoranda of Understanding with relevant international non-governmental organizations, such as ICSU, the Third World Academy of Sciences (TWAS), IIASA, the World Academy of Art and Science (WAAS), and IUCN. The Academy may also seek a highly reputable patron.

LOCATION

21. As previously described, the Academy would have basic research facilities to allow it to organize international and interdisciplinary research and training programmes. It would be a significant asset for the Academy if it could have a close working relationship with a supporting organization from within academic circles that deals with interdisciplinary activities. Another consideration must be proximity to as many environmental sciences and economics institutions as possible.

V. COST

22. At the beginning, the activities of the Academy would require funding of between $4.5 million and $5 million per year. This budget would increase to $8-10 million per year as the Academy's programmes and financial basis develop.

23. If the Governing Council agrees to the idea of establishing of the Academy, it may then wish to authorize the Executive Director to do so on an experimental basis for a period of two years and to approve US$1.2 million for that period 2/. The rest of the resources needed for the experimental stage will have to be obtained from donor Governments, supporting organizations, foundations, business and industry. Other United Nations organizations and agencies, such as Unesco and UNU, could contribute in a variety of ways, such as by extending their scholarship and research grants through the Academy. The establishment of a fund to support the Academy could ensure that it could quickly become independent.

2/ UNEPGC.16/15.

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Corrigendum

Page 1

The section headed "Suggested action by the Governing Council" should be deleted.

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